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ABSTRACT

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The Effects of Inequity, Sex, and Self-esteem on Source Valence in Dyadic Communication

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to probe selected implications from equity theory within an interpersonal communication context. Independent variables were interpersonal equity-inequity, sex, and self-esteem. The dependent variable included nine independent dimensions of source valence. Ss performed two similar verbal tasks with a confederate partner. For the first, equitable grades were acquired. For the second, experimental Ss received unfair grades. Results indicated limited support that victimized persons distort their perceptions of an exploiter to regain a state of psychological equity. The sex and self-esteem variables produced no main effects. Pretest scores were not predictive of posttest scores.

The Effects of Inequity, Sex, and Self-esteem on Source Valence in Dyadic Communication

When humans communicate, an important determinant of the effectiveness of the outcomes is the state of balance which characterizes the interaction. Substantial theory (Heider, 1946, 1958; Newcomb, 1953; Osgood and Tannenbaum, 1955) supported by empirical research suggests that each participant in a social exchange relationship strives for a state of equity, which may or may not always be present. This study of the causes and consequences of inequity has resulted in a viable area of research and theory identified as equity theory. Even though a theory of equity has strong implications for the field of communication, little systematic effort has been directed toward its application to the study of communication. To help initiate this linkage, the present study was designed to investigate selected implications of equity theory within an interpersonal communication context.

Rationale and Problem

Interpersonal Equity-Inequity. The structural propositions of equity theory (Adams, 1963; 1965) have been derived principally from social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1961) and cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957). Equity theory is a structure of interrelated propositions which particularize the dynamics involved when individuals perceive that their actions have or have not been justly rewarded (Sussman, 1975). Adams (1963, 1965) argues that inequity exists when individuals (Persons) perceive the rewards they have obtained in a social exchange relationship are disproportionate to those of a comparison individual or group (Other). Sussman (1975) has delineated four types of inequity based on the contribution-reward ratios

of Persons and Other. The present study was limited to examining the type of inequity found when Persons' and Others' contributions (inputs) were equal but Persons' rewards (outcomes) were less than those of Others'.

When Persons find themselves in an inequitable condition, they seek to restore "actual" equity to the relationship. However, when such a strategy is not possible, Persons may restore "psychological" equity by distorting their perceptions of their own or Other's inputs and outcomes (Walster, Berscheid, and Walster, 1973). From among the psychological rationalizations Persons may use to regain psychological equity, the present study (Opell, 1976) originated the theoretical postulate that Persons may restore equity by persuading themselves that Other's attributes are different under an inequitable condition than when initially perceived under a state of equity. Because Persons generally strive for psychological balance within an interactive relationship, an inequitable condition could produce otherwise unexplainable differences in Persons' evaluations of Other's attributes.

Self-esteem. Previous reseach (Cohen, 1956; Glass, 1964, Thomas and Burdick, 1954) has indicated the self-esteem variable has theoretic import for equity research. It could be expected that the esteem in which individuals hold themselves could make a difference in their efforts to restore equity (Walster, Berscheid, and Walster, 1973). In some equity studies (Adams, 1963; Adams and Jacobson, 1964; Glass, 1964) self-esteem has been mismanaged. This study sought to examine self-esteem in order to increase understanding of its influence regarding psychological restoration of equity to an inequitable state.

Sex. Equity studies (Blumstein and Weinstein, 1969; Callahan and Messé, 1973; Leventhal and Lane, 1970; Radinsky, 1969; Wyler and Malinowski, 1972)

generally indicate that there are differences in the way males and females respond to equitable and inequitable conditions. Unfortunately, most of these studies suffer from methodological weaknesses which limit the confidence that can be placed in them. This limitation, in combination with the absence of research on differences when male and female victims psychologically distort their perceptions of Other's attributes, required that the sex variable be systematically included within the design of the present study.

Source Valence. For some time much attention has focused upon evaluations of communication sources (Andersen and Clevenger, 1963). Attempts have been made to synthesize the various components of source evaluation into a single construct. Lashbrook and McCroskey (Note 1) have summarized the research on communication sources and developed a multicomponential concept labeled source valence.

Source valence, embracing the variables of credibility, interpersonal attraction, and homophily, provides a useful tool for indicating Persons' perceptions of the attributes of Other (the source). Developed from an extensive empirical base, each of these three variables comprising source valence has been shown to be multidimensional constructs. McCroskey, Richmond, and Daly (Note 2) have offered empirical support for this position. Thus, in order to ascertain Persons' perceptions of Others' attributes, nine independent dimensions of source valence were used in the study, including competence, extroversion, sociability, composure, physical attraction, social attraction, task attraction, attitude homophily, and background homophily.

Hypotheses. Under equitable and inequitable conditions, source valence can measure changes in Persons' perceptions of Other. Such changes might be expected to have an impact upon understanding the complexity of maintaining a

balanced state within a communication interaction. Thus, using formulations from equity theory and the hypothetical construct of source valence, it was hypothesized:

H_1 When cast as a predictor in an ANOVA equation or an MDA equation, an inequitable condition will have a significant effect upon the change in Persons' perceptions of Other, as measured by source valence dimensions.

With the expectation that an inequitable relationship produces differences in perceptions, another research question became apparent. This study sought to determine if perceptions under a state of equity were predictive of perceptions under a state of inequity. If so, predictable patterns of individuals' perceptions could be ascertained from the source valence construct. Since little is known of the predictive capabilities of source valence in dyadic situations under equity-inequity, it was hypothesized:

H_2 When cast in a linear regression equation, ratings on the dimensions of source valence measured after establishment of an equitable condition will predict Persons' ratings of source valence after an inequitable condition.

Previous research has suggested, but not explicated clearly, that differences exist in the way males and females cope with inequitable relationships. Furthermore, research has indicated that individuals' self-esteem may influence individuals' perceptions and be a contributing variable in regaining a state of psychological equity. However, neither the self-esteem variable nor the sex variable has been systematically examined independently or collectively in equity research. Thus, it was hypothesized:

H_3 When cast as predictors in an ANOVA equation or an MDA equation, the variables of sex and self-esteem, separately or together, will have a significant effect on the change in Persons' perceptions of the source valence of Other.

Methods and Procedures

Sample of Persons. A total of 214 students enrolled in a basic communication course were employed for this study. Persons were randomly assigned by sex to experimental and control groups, and they were randomly assigned to a male or female confederate partner. Of the sample, data from 180 students were analyzed. Twenty-three students failed to meet the requirement of awarding the same numerical grades for the first of two tasks performed. Eight students did not respond to all items on the data-gathering instruments. Data from three students were not used because of experimenter error.

Independent Variables. The three independent variables examined in the study were (1) interpersonal equity-inequity, (2) sex, and (3) self-esteem.

A survey (N = 337) conducted prior to the study (Spell, 1976) revealed that a grade 5.6 points lower or 5.27 points higher than that of a classmate was considered unfair when both students did equal quantity and quality work. Based on these results, a grade difference of 15 points was considered an inequitable condition for students. Thus interpersonal equity was operationalized as equal grade distribution in the dyad, while inequity was produced by awarding a 15-point lower grade for experimental group students.

An interaction word-association game known as Password was selected as best meeting the experiment's design and purpose. Except for no time limit

and a screen being placed between players to mask nonverbal cues, the regular rules were followed for Password. Words employed were chosen on the basis of their concreteness, imagery, meaningfulness, frequency of occurrence in the English language, and synonym capability (Spell, 1976). These criteria were employed to insure that each word would be within the students' vocabularies and their word-association repertories. Applying these criteria to normative data for word lists (Paivio, Yuille, and Madigan, 1968), 20 words were chosen, including four used in a practice session.[1]

Each subject participated in two stimulus conditions with one of the two confederates. In the first, each dyadic member was given randomly selected passwords from the predetermined list and instructed to get the partner to say each word. At the end of this round, the student awarded numerical grades to both himself/herself and the confederate partner. If the grades were identical, a state of equity was assumed to exist. The second stimulus condition was procedurally identical to the first. After completing the round, the confederate awarded grades to both members. For 85 students in the experimental condition, each received a grade 15 points lower than the confederates', who awarded themselves the same grades received in the first stimulus condition. For the other 95 students, the confederates awarded the same grades given in the first stimulus condition.

The study examined the sex variable by randomly assigning students to same-sex and opposite-sex dyads. The male and the female confederates were also randomly assigned to the dyads. Thus, the design permitted measurement across all conditions of sex within randomly formed dyads.

Self-esteem was operationally defined as self-ratings on a modified form of Pitt's (1964) Tennessee Self-Concept Scale. Thirty-five Likert-type items

were selected as most appropriate for the study's purpose (Spell, 1976). These items were administered to 128 students three months prior to the experiment. Resulting data were factor analyzed using a Varimax rotation. Three criteria were used for a factor to be considered viable: (1) Each item must have had a primary loading of .50 or higher and no secondary loading of .40 or higher.[2] (2) At least two items must have met the first criterion to be considered a viable dimension. (3) Each dimension must have had an Eigen value of 1.0 or higher and an internal reliability coefficient of .60 or higher. Results of this factor analysis and a replication of the analysis yielded two dimensions of self-esteem encompassing 14 items from the original 35 items. The two dimensions were labeled social-self and personal-self (Spell, 1976).

From the students participating in the experiment, self-esteem ratings were submitted to another factor analysis, utilizing the previously stated criteria. Only 12 of the 14 items for which data were collected met all criteria and yielded the same two dimensions. Only these 12 were used in the data analysis.[3]

Internal reliability coefficients of .93 for social-self and .94 for personal-self were obtained for the experimental data, using Nunnally's (1967) Formula 6 - 18. Post-hoc reliability analyses were performed, using 52 students who were given the self-esteem scales again just prior to final debriefing. Results of the test-retest reliability estimates yielded a coefficient of .5916. Since students' responses could have been confounded by the experimental treatment, an additional reliability check was performed. Another 159 students were given the self-esteem scales during the school term following the experiment, with a retest three weeks later. This reliability check yielded a correlation

coefficient of .77.

Based on these results, the dimensions and related self-esteem scales were considered to be sufficiently reliable and valid for the purpose of this study.

Dependent Variables. The nine dimensions of source valence, comprising three components, served as the dependent variables. Source credibility, encompassing competence, extroversion, sociability, and composure, has been shown to be a major component of source valence (McCroskey, Jensen, and Todd, Note 3). Modifications of scales developed by McCroskey, Jensen, and Todd (Note 3) and Andersen (1975) yielded four dimensions of credibility encompassing 12 items.[4] Internal reliability coefficients, using Nunnally's (1967) Formula 6 - 18, indicated the following coefficients: competence, .97; extroversion, .93; sociability, .95; and composure, .98. The derived source credibility dimensions and related scales were considered to be sufficiently reliable and valid for use in this study.

Physical, social, and task attraction comprised the second component, interpersonal attraction, which has been established in previous research by McCroskey and McCain (1974). Fifteen items generated by McCroskey and McCain (1974) were used as initial measurements of attraction. The results of the factor analysis yielded three dimensions of attraction totaling 10 items.[5] These scales were submitted to Nunnally's (1967) Formula 6 - 18 and yielded the following reliability coefficients: physical attraction, .98; social attraction, .97; task attraction, .91. The resulting interpersonal attraction dimensions and related scales were determined to be sufficiently reliable and valid for the purpose of this study.

Homophily, the third component, included the dimensions of attitude and

background similarities, as determined by Andersen (1975). Nine scales utilized by Andersen (1975) were used to measure homophily. Factor analysis of these scales yielded two dimensions of homophily, encompassing five items.[6] Internal reliability estimates using Nunnally's (1967) Formula 6 - 18 indicated a coefficient of .84 for attitude homophily and .77 for background homophily. The derived homophily dimensions and related scales were considered to be adequately reliable and valid for the present study.

Procedures. Before the experiment the male and the female confederate completed a thorough training program, including simulated sessions with non-participants. The confederates were instructed to match student inputs by making the same number of correct and incorrect responses and paralleling student behavior as closely as possible.

Students were given three options for completing a required verbal communication assignment, one of which was to participate in the "Verbal Communication Project," as the experiment was called. Upon arriving for the experiment, students completed an information sheet which included demographic items and the self-esteem scales. After completing round one of the Password game and awarding grades, they completed an opinionnaire of their partner which contained the source valence items. Following the second round, the confederate awarded grades and the students completed a second copy of the opinionnaire. Students responded to a written and oral question session to determine if the true nature of the experiment had been detected. When all students had completed the experiment, they were debriefed and told they would receive extra course credit for their participation.

Analysis of Data. A 2 X 2 X 2 ANOVA was used to assess differences in effects across control-experimental groups, students' sex, and confederates'

sex. A 2 X 4 ANOVA assessed differences across control-experimental groups and self-esteem groups, divided into four quartiles (high, medium-high, medium-low, and low).

A linear regression analysis was used to determine if pretest scores predicted posttest scores under conditions of equity and inequity.

Multiple discriminant analysis (MDA) was used to test for significant differences between control-experimental groups and self-esteem quartiles, as well as control-experimental groups, students' sex, and the self-esteem quartiles.

Results

Results suggest limited support for the first hypothesis and a failure to support the second and third hypotheses.

Hypothesis One. The experimental group (N = 85) significantly lowered their ratings of the confederate partners' competence, sociability, and attitude similarity, as revealed by the ANOVA test (see Table 1). In addition to these three dimensions, the MDA tests yielded a significant chi-square on the social attraction dimension as well (see Table 2). Thus, on four dimensions, students' membership into control or experimental groups could be significantly predicted.

Tables 1 and 2 about here

Hypothesis Two. The results of the regression analyses of control and experimental groups yielded results indicating that when students moved from an equity condition to a later equity condition, their initial ratings were predictive of their second ratings on all dimensions except task attraction, as displayed in Table 3.

Table 3 about here

For the experimental group, the results indicated that when students' initial ratings under an equity condition changed significantly under an inequity condition (see Tables 1 and 2), second ratings were not predictive of initial ratings. Thus, experimental students' ratings on the dimensions of competence, sociability, social attraction, task attraction, and attitude were not predictive from equity to inequity conditions. In combination, the results provided some support for the validity of the independent variable; namely, that inequity was established in the experimental group, but not in the control group.

Hypothesis Three. The results of the ANOVA and MDA analyses revealed that students' sex, confederates' sex, students' self-esteem, and students' sex and self-esteem together did not yield any significant main effects on students' ratings of their partners across the control and experimental conditions. However, the ANOVA tests yielded 14 significant interactions, as shown in Table 4. These were statistically analyzed to determine the effects

Table 4 about here

indicated by the interactions. Students' sex and control/experimental conditions provided significant interactions on the social attraction and attitude dimensions. Significant interactions across confederates' sex and control/experimental conditions were found on the students' ratings for the competence, sociability, composure, and attitude dimensions. Students' sex and confederates' sex yielded significant interactions on students' ratings of the confederates' sociability, social attraction, task attraction, and attitude. Three-way interactions were found among students' sex, confederates' sex, and control/experimental conditions on the sociability, social attraction, task attraction, and attiude dimensions.

Discussion and Implications

Theoretical. Analyses of the data revealed that when persons find themselves victimized by the misallocation of a justly earned reward, they tend to seek restitution by distorting their perceptions of their exploiter's attributes. Persons lower their estimations of the exploiter's credibility, social attraction, and homophily characteristics. Thus, implications derived from the study generally support the postulates of equity theory selected for examination from those delineated by Walster, Berscheid, and Walster (1973) and Sussman (1975) among others. As predicted, one of the consequences of perceived injustice is the alteration of one's perceptions in order to regain a state of psychological balance within a social exchange relationship (Walster, Berscheid, and Walster, 1973).

When significant changes in persons' ratings occur, pretest ratings are not predictive of posttest ratings. Such findings intimate that an imbalance within relationships cause individuals to distort their perceptions with such variability that no predictable pattern of change can be systematically measured. Thus, victimized persons appear to cope with inequity in highly diverse manners.

The variables of sex and self-esteem, separately and collectively, did not account for changes in persons' perceptions of their exploiters. Thus, within the limits of the sample used, sex and self-esteem appear to be variables which do not account for any main effects.

The results of the 14 significant interactions suggest three conclusions and corresponding implications. Seven of the interactions revealed persons' lowered their ratings significantly more when participating in same-sex than in opposite-sex dyads. When same-sex partners do not meet the expectations demanded by cultural norms and conditioning, persons experience dissonance.

To reduce the dissonance (Adams, 1963, 1965), persons lower their opinions of same-sex partners by greater proportions than opposite-sex partners. Thus, victimized individuals respond differently to inequity according to the combination of their own sex and that of their exploiter.

Five of the interactions suggest that males tend to lose more credibility under inequity than do females. While this may have been a function of the personality traits of the confederates, another possible explanation lies within the domain of sex-role stereotyping. While sexual stereotyping is probably changing, it is still observable in society. Whatever the reason, the study showed that when compared to a female's ratings across equity and inequity conditions, a male lost significantly more credibility.

A lack of female tolerance for inequity is the final implication drawn from the interactions. Previous research (Callahan and Messé, 1973; Radinsky, 1969) has shown females to be less tolerant of inequity than males, and the present study corroborates this finding. On the two dimensions of social attraction and attitude homophily, more tension appears to occur within females under inequity than males. To reduce this tension, females alter their perceptions much more than males. These alterations may have been a psychological aid used by females in coping with an inequitable relationship.

Methodological. Use of numerical grades as a reward/outcome condition appeared to be generally effective. However, the experiment extended over a five-week period. In addition, all students may not perceive the relative fairness or unfairness of grades with the same perceptions. Therefore, saliency may have been an influencing but uncontrolled factor in the participants' realization and consequent reduction of inequity. Unfortunately, the experimental design did not control for this type of variability.

The self-esteem and source valence instruments proved to be generally useful tools. The fact that the two dimensions of self-esteem and the nine dimensions of source valence remained basically intact following factor analyses provided a measure of confidence that these scales and their underlying constructs are viable. Each dimension was considered to be discrete from other dimensions. There exists some empirical evidence (Aronson, 1972; Berscheid and Walster, 1969; Byrne, 1968, 1969; Keisler and Goldberg, 1968) of relatedness among source valence dimensions. Generally, positive evaluations of one type often lead to other types. However, under the formulations of equity theory, the expectation is for inequity ratings to be negative evaluations rather than positive. Therefore, without the reinforcement of positive ratings, the dimensions of source valence employed after factor analysis were considered to be independent and permitted analyses based on this autonomy.

It is possible that the participants found other means of reducing the tension created by the inequitable condition other than in paper-and-pencil ratings of their partner. In addition, the possibility of demand bias in self-report measures cannot be completely ignored. Therefore, additional measurements such as those employed in behavioral and physiological studies might have contributed more information regarding inequity-reduction strategies.

Further Research. This study examined only one of the inequity conditions from the possible combinations of the input-outcome ratios of Person and Other. More research is needed, as Sussman (1975) has suggested, regarding conditions in which (1) Persons' outcomes are greater than those of Other while inputs remain equal, (2) Persons' inputs are greater while Persons' and Other's outcomes are equal, and (3) Other's inputs are greater while Persons' and Other's outcomes are equal.

The dyadic condition used in the study should be extended to small-group formations as well as other areas within the field of communication (i.e., public address, mass communication, intercultural, information systems, and organizational communication).

The sample of persons in the investigation was restricted to college students. Explorations into the consequences of inequity across varying age and ethnic groups may prove to be beneficial also.

Footnotes

[1]The passwords randomly assigned to the two stimulus conditions were church, city, doctor, earth, fire, grass, judge, king, lake, paper, plant, star, storm, sugar, table, and woods. The words used in the practice session were book, child, horse, and ship.

[2]While a primary loading of .60 is often required in seminal research on scale construction, a less conservative criterion of .50 was employed to preserve any item not quite meeting the .60 criterion in this initial study.

[3]The self-esteem items representing the social-self dimension were (1) I am hard to be friendly with, (2) I get along well with other people, (3) I find it hard to talk to strangers, (4) I am a cheerful person, (5) I am a friendly person, and (6) I do not feel at ease with people. Items comprising the personal-self dimension were (1) I am satisfied to be just what I am, (2) I am as smart as I want to be, (3) I am as sociable as I want to be, and (4) I solve my problems quite easily.

[4]The credibility scales meeting all criteria were the following: (1) Competence: He(She) is a dependable person. I can believe in him(her). I have confidence in his(her) ability to get the job done. (2) Extroversion: He(She) is quite agressive. He(She) is an extrovert. (3) Sociability: He(She) is a cheerful person. He(She) is a good-natured person. He(She) is unsociable. It would be difficult to talk with him(her). (4) Composure: He(She) is nervous. He(She) appears to be tense. He(She) is a timid person.

[5]The interpersonal attraction scales meeting all criteria were the

following: (1) Physical: I think he(she) is quite handsome(pretty). He(She) is very sexy looking. I find him(her) very attractive physically. He(She) is somewhat ugly. (2) Social: I think he(she) could be a friend of mine. He(She) just wouldn't fit into my circle of friends. We could never establish a friendship bond between us. I would like to have a friendly chat with him(her). (3) Task: He(She) is a typical goof-off when assigned a job to do. His(Her) beliefs are different from mine.

[6]The homophily scales meeting all criteria were the following: (1) Attitude: His(Her) attitudes are about the same as mine. His(Her) goals are the same as mine. (2) Background: His(Her) educational background is similar to mine. His(Her) background is similar to mine. His(Her) cultural background is similar to mine.

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Table 1

ANOVA Results for Differences Between Ratings on Source Valence Dimensions for Experimental and Control Groups

Dimensions	df	SS	MS	F	
Competence	1	90.89	90.89	15.03	$p \leq .01$
Extroversion	1	.31	.31	.16	
Sociability	1	55.84	55.84	7.23	$p \leq .01$
Composure	1	6.66	6.66	1.28	
Physical Attraction	1	37.10	37.10	4.56	
Social Attraction	1	67.16	67.16	6.02	
Task Attraction	1	9.64	9.64	4.51	
Attitude	1	25.26	25.26	10.64	$p \leq .01$
Background	1	26.09	26.09	5.74	

Table 2

MDA Results for Differences Between Ratings on Source Valence Dimensions for Experimental and Control Groups

Dimensions	Standardized Discriminant Function	Percent of Students Classified Correctly	Chi-square
Competence	.91	68.9	25.69 *
Extroversion	.80	56.1	2.69
Sociability	.78	60.0	7.20 *
Composure	.87	52.2	.36
Physical Attraction	.87	59.4	6.42
Social Attraction	.97	63.3	12.80 *
Task Attraction	.80	58.3	5.00
Attitude	.89	61.1	8.89 *
Background	.75	59.4	6.42

* $p \leq .01$

Table 3

Regression Analysis Results Between Pretest-Posttest Scores on Source Valence Dimensions for Control (Equity) and Experimental (Inequity) Groups

Dimensions	Control (Equity)		Experimental (Inequity)	
	R^2	F	R^2	F
Competence	.29	38.64 *	.00	.08
Extroversion	.62	150.87 *	.16	15.59 *
Sociability	.32	43.63 *	.03	2.35
Composure	.60	141.78 *	.25	27.46 *
Physical Attraction	.87	624.45 *	.40	53.81 *
Social Attraction	.59	137.54 *	.01	1.19
Task Attraction	.07	7.28	.00	.03
Attitude	.44	72.41 *	.07	6.03
Background	.37	55.83 *	.27	30.27 *

* $p \leq .01$

Table 4

ANOVA Results for Interactions Between Ratings on Source Valence Dimensions for Combinations of Experimental and Control Groups (E), Students' Sex (S), and Confederates' Sex (C)

Dimensions	F - values			
	E X S	E X C	S X C	E X S X C
Competence	5.28	8.79 *	5.94	5.13
Extroversion	2.47	1.03	3.39	.38
Sociability	5.84	16.95 *	9.70 *	7.22 *
Composure	.00	10.36 *	3.24	.00
Physical Attraction	2.84	2.96	5.45	1.21
Social Attraction	12.30 *	5.39	11.97 *	9.76
Task Attraction	.91	4.10	9.41 *	10.17 *
Attitude	6.93 *	8.09 *	12.81 *	9.11 *
Background	.87	6.64	.43	4.23

* $p \leq .01$